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Those FOIA blues

TO THE REVIEW:

Steve Weinberg's "Trashing the FOIA" (CJR, January/February) must have produced a few smiles from journalists who read the response Ted Gup of *The Washington Post* received from the CIA's Larry Strawderman, who apologized for a lengthy delay in processing Gup's request for agency documents.

Ditto, almost word for word, the response I received from Mr. Strawderman a couple of years ago after we had exchanged letters for about a year. The agency finally coughed up two pages of "sanitized" (one of my favorite FOI words) documents at a total cost of a little over \$400.

Thank God. I was working for a news organization — the Mansfield, Ohio, *News Journal* — which has stamina and exercises a strong commitment to good journalism. There are some 40,000-circulation dailies that would balk at such costs and abandon the FOI as one avenue in their newsgathering effort.

I second Weinberg's call for those of us in the news business to persuade Congress that the FOIA is a vital tool for informing the public. I think it is important to remember that the FOIA is not an exclusive playground for journalists. The intent of the statute is to make government records and information readily accessible to the public — journalists and nonjournalists alike.

I would also like to see some kind of workable advocacy program put in place to monitor compliance with the law. It would be great to have someone in government offices looking over the shoulders of the sanitizers, making sure that my request is being met with the fullest possible disclosure.

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